

Mount Mitchell State Park



Saving the Mountain; Making a Park

Mount Mitchell, the highest mountain peak in the eastern U.S., is located in the Black Mountain range in Yancey County, NC. It was named after Dr. Elisha Mitchell, the first man to study the height of the mountain and who lost his life while doing more research on the mountain. Reaching 6,684 ft., Mount Mitchell hosts a unique alpine forest that only grows on slopes above 5,500 ft. The forest is mostly made up of Red Spruce and Fraser Fir trees. If you've never hiked in this type of environment, imagine a cool, damp forest with mosses and lichens growing everywhere and the air smelling like a fragrant Christmas tree. The mountain summit gets over 100 inches of snow every year and the average high temperature in July is only 66 degrees F. It is sometimes called "Canada Down South" because the plants and animals here are similar to what you'd find in Maine and Canada. The Northern Flying Squirrel, the Red Crossbill and the Northern Saw-whet Owl are just a few examples.

By the early 1900's, the slopes of the Black Mountains were being logged heavily. The Red Spruce wood was valuable for musical instruments, and when World War I began, it was needed for the frames of airplanes. In 1911, the Perley and Crockett Lumber Company built a narrow logging railroad most of the way up the steep slopes and later built a camp on the mountain, called Camp Alice, to increase their logging industry.



By 1914, the logging company was using that same railroad to make extra money by bringing tourists up the mountain. The trip from the town of Black Mountain to Camp Alice was 21 miles, took four hours, and included nine switchbacks on the railroad. From there, it was another hour hike up to the mountain summit. But the people came in crowds anyway!



Interestingly, the railroad originally built for logging also helped get thousands of people up the mountain to see its beauty, and its destruction. After that, North Carolina citizens took action! They wrote letters and newspaper articles until they got the attention of politicians

and Governor Locke Craig. Citizens convinced them to save the mountain and its forests before it was too late. On March 3, 1915, Governor Locke Craig signed a law allowing the state to purchase roughly 524 acres around the Mount Mitchell summit. By 1916, the mountain summit had been protected and our first State Park was born.

“...it is deemed desirable that this beautiful and elevated spot shall be acquired and permanently dedicated as a State Park for the use of the people of the entire State seeking health and recreation.” – Gov. Locke Craig at the signing of the law, 1915

Below are writing suggestions. Poems written on other topics still focused on Mount Mitchell will be accepted as well. These are **simply suggestions** to get your creativity started.

Writing Suggestions:

- Imagine you're a North Carolina citizen from 1915 wanting to protect Mount Mitchell. What would you say in your poem to convince others to want to protect the mountain too?
- Imagine you could send your poem 100 years back in time. What would you say to the people of North Carolina who worked hard to create our first state park?
- Imagine you are Mount Mitchell itself. What story would you tell in a poem?
- If you could write a poem to Mount Mitchell, what would you say?



NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS
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